

## THE "PRAETORIUM" AT MUSMIYE

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The "Praetorium" at Musmiye has always been something of an enigma, although many scholars have endeavored to view it as an important precursor of the Middle Byzantine cross-in-square church.<sup>1</sup> Built between A.D. 164 and A.D. 169,<sup>2</sup> it was converted into a Christian church probably before A.D. 450. The monument was first reported by J. L. Burckhardt, who saw it late in 1810 and published some of its inscriptions with an incomplete sketch plan.<sup>3</sup> The structure was apparently still intact in 1827, but by 1830 the central vault had fallen,<sup>4</sup> and around 1890 the building was dismantled for the construction of a barracks.

Scholars have been dependent on a few nineteenth-century engravings for the study

of this monument. Of the available plans, Burckhardt's is worthless, while those of C. J. M. de Vogüé and E. G. Rey disagree on various fundamental points. Early engravings are never entirely trustworthy, since they inevitably passed through several hands before their eventual publication. De Vogüé's drawings have no less than four signatures: his own, his architect's, the draftsman's, and the printer's. He tells us about the fantastic inaccuracy of Laborde's drawing,<sup>5</sup> but we have to accept his opinion as to the superiority of his own view of the interior. He did not, however, attempt to improve upon Rey's view of the exterior which was a lithograph made from a photograph.<sup>6</sup>

On the basis of the two plans and four drawings referred to above, E. Weigand wrote the most penetrating study of the building yet published.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, he was unaware of the almost simultaneous publication by J. W. Crowfoot of a further nineteenth-century drawing (Bankes Collection) which, inasmuch as it was never edited for publication, is in many ways more informative than the finished drawings on which Weigand's article is based.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this note is to publish two photographs of the "Praetorium" which were taken by the American missionary Selah

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Professor Andrew Keck, who first discovered the existence of the photographs published here, for kindly waiving his claim to publication, and for his generous encouragement. I would also like to thank Mr. Robert L. Van Nice for drawing my attention to the copies at Dumbarton Oaks. The views shown here are reprinted from Dumbarton Oaks's copy negatives made in 1973 from prints at the Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, with grateful acknowledgment to the latter.

<sup>2</sup> The inscriptions on the building have been published in various places, but the most complete account was given by Waddington (de Vogüé's traveling companion [note 5 *infra*]) in P. Le Bas and W. H. Waddington, *Voyage archéologique en Grèce et en Asie Mineure*, III: *Inscriptions grecques et latines* (Paris, 1870). Waddington's inscription no. 2525 is the one over the main doorway (fig. 6), which mentions as co-emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, and as legate Avidius Cassius, who was sent to Syria in A.D. 164.

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (London, 1822), 115-18.

<sup>4</sup> Laborde visited the site in 1827, and showed the vault still standing: L. de Laborde, *Voyage de la Syrie* (Paris, 1837), 57, pl. 51. Robinson, who visited Musmiye in 1830, observed that the roof had collapsed: G. Robinson, *Travels in Palestine and Syria* (London, 1837), II, 130-31.

<sup>5</sup> C. J. M. de Vogüé, *Syrie centrale. Architecture civile et religieuse du I<sup>er</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, I (Paris, 1865), 45-46, pl. 7. "Exacte dans son ensemble, elle ne reproduit pas les curieux détails de construction que nous avons signalés: ils sont remplacés par un appareil de fantaisie dont le lithographe a couvert les surfaces" (p. 46 note).

<sup>6</sup> E. G. Rey, *Voyage dans le Haouran* (Paris, ca. 1860), 55-60, pl. 3.

<sup>7</sup> "Das sogenannte Praetorium von Phaenamismije," *Würzburger Festgabe Heinrich Bulle* (Stuttgart, 1938), 71-92.

<sup>8</sup> *Early Churches in Palestine* (London, 1941), pl. VIIIa. This was the publication of the Schweich Lectures on Biblical Archaeology given at the British Academy in 1937.

Merrill in the autumn of 1875. These were issued in an album of one hundred photographs to accompany the Fourth Statement of the American Palestine Exploration Society, published in 1877.<sup>9</sup> The album was not issued to all subscribers, but a copy of this valuable book is held by the Princeton Theological Seminary. Photographs numbers 23 and 24 are reproduced here.

The exterior view (fig. 1) shows a building with three of the six Doric columns of its portico still standing, the three columns on the right-hand side and the shallow Syrian arch over the wider central intercolumniation having fallen. A flight of six steps led up to the portico.<sup>10</sup> The façade was pierced by three doorways, the central and largest of which was framed by simply molded jambs and lintel and surmounted by a shallow, arched tympanum which rested on the cornice ostensibly supported by the fine decorative consoles which flanked the lintel (fig. 6). On either side of the main door were smaller ones with similar jambs and lintels, again flanked by decorative consoles. But here the cornice above the consoles was surmounted by aediculae crowned with conchae and framed by pairs of Ionic columns supporting broken pediments. Inscriptions at the base of these columns (barely discernible in figs. 1 and 5) reveal that the aedicula on the left contained a statue of Eirene, while that on the right held a statue of Isis.<sup>11</sup> The central space between the main doorway and the portico was covered by a characteristic Hauran "barrel vault" consisting of long slabs of stone laid across the full width; one such slab is visible in situ to the left of the tympanum. In all probability, the architrave of the porch supported a pediment broken by the central arch. The few stubs of masonry visible at the top of the building show that the main wall must once have been higher than it was in 1875. At either end of the façade was a slightly projecting fillet of masonry; that on

the right-hand corner included two springing stones for an arch (the stone in the course above was cut to receive the third corbel). This feature is now inexplicable, but may well have been a secondary insertion.

The foreshortened view of the right side of the building shows a high window at the center of the wall; a corresponding window on the opposite side is visible in Bankes's view of the interior. The door from the side chamber which appears on Rey's plan is not documented in the photograph.

The view of the interior (fig. 2) is more tantalizing than illuminating.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the photograph resolves the problem of whether the outer supports against the walls were freestanding, as in de Vogüé's plan, or engaged half-columns, as they appear in Bankes's drawing. The half-columns were, in fact, constructed in courses corresponding exactly to those of the wall in which they were engaged, and must have been a primary feature of the building. Weigand believed that the centralized plan was a secondary one imposed on the building at the time of its conversion into a church. The freestanding columns were monolithic, each with an unusual decorative wreath carved around it near the top which did not appear on the half-columns. The capitals of the freestanding columns, however, corresponded exactly to those of the half-columns, as, to judge from the drawings, did their bases. It is as hard to believe that these bases, so characteristic of Roman architecture of the second century, could have formed part of a fourth- or fifth-century building scheme as it is to believe that the impost blocks, which sit so uneasily on the capitals of the freestanding columns, could be earlier than the fourth, or more probably the fifth, century. These columns were surely part of the original design for the building, left in situ at the time of its conversion to Christian use. If the overall dimensions of de Vogüé's plan are correct, the possibility of inserting four columns into the plan in line with eight existing half-columns to give a perfect square at the center of the

<sup>9</sup> "List of Photographic Views, taken Expressly for the American Palestine Exploration Society, during a Reconnaissance East of the Jordan, in the Autumn of 1875," *Palestine Exploration Society. Fourth Statement* (New York, 1877), 101-13.

<sup>10</sup> Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, 115.

<sup>11</sup> Waddington, *op. cit.*, nos. 2526 and 2527 respectively.

<sup>12</sup> It is unfortunate that the photograph shows nothing of the roofing system, but this was presumably a result of the difficulty of taking photographs within a complex building measuring fourteen meters square internally.

building (fig. 4) would have been a remarkably convenient circumstance. The presence of the impost blocks raises the possibility that the roofing system was changed or replaced; this idea is further corroborated by the curious fact that, although the block that can be seen resting on the impost and the inelegant squared stone above the half-column capital were left plain (fig. 3), there was a molding on the much less prominent architrave within the corner square to the right (not visible in the photograph). Bankes's drawing shows that this molding, broken regularly by the squared stones above the half-column capitals, encircled the chamber. The possibility must be considered that these capitals once supported an architrave directly but that this was removed with some change of the roof structure. At the time this was done the impost blocks could have been inserted, perhaps to accommodate the more complicated stresses of a new roofing system. The addition of the imposts would have necessitated the insertion of the squared blocks above the half-column capitals in order to allow for the change in height, and to disguise the scar caused by the removal of the earlier architrave. The mason's mark 2 II is visible on the block above the half-column capital.

The question of whether the conversion of this building to a church radically affected the roofing system cannot, I believe, be resolved on the basis of the evidence now available. Nonetheless, I consider it unlikely that there were ever any changes in the ground plan. The major alteration which can be documented is the blocking of the main entrance to form a much smaller doorway with a double-arched window (with imposts) above. The Christian lintel had a roundel at its center, as is often the case, but there is no visible trace of a cross or other emblem within it. In the tympanum, two smaller windows with monolithic arches were inserted, of which that on the right was equipped with a slightly projecting plain molding (fig. 6).

It is surely absurd to attempt to show that Middle Byzantine architects referred directly to this building as a prototype for their

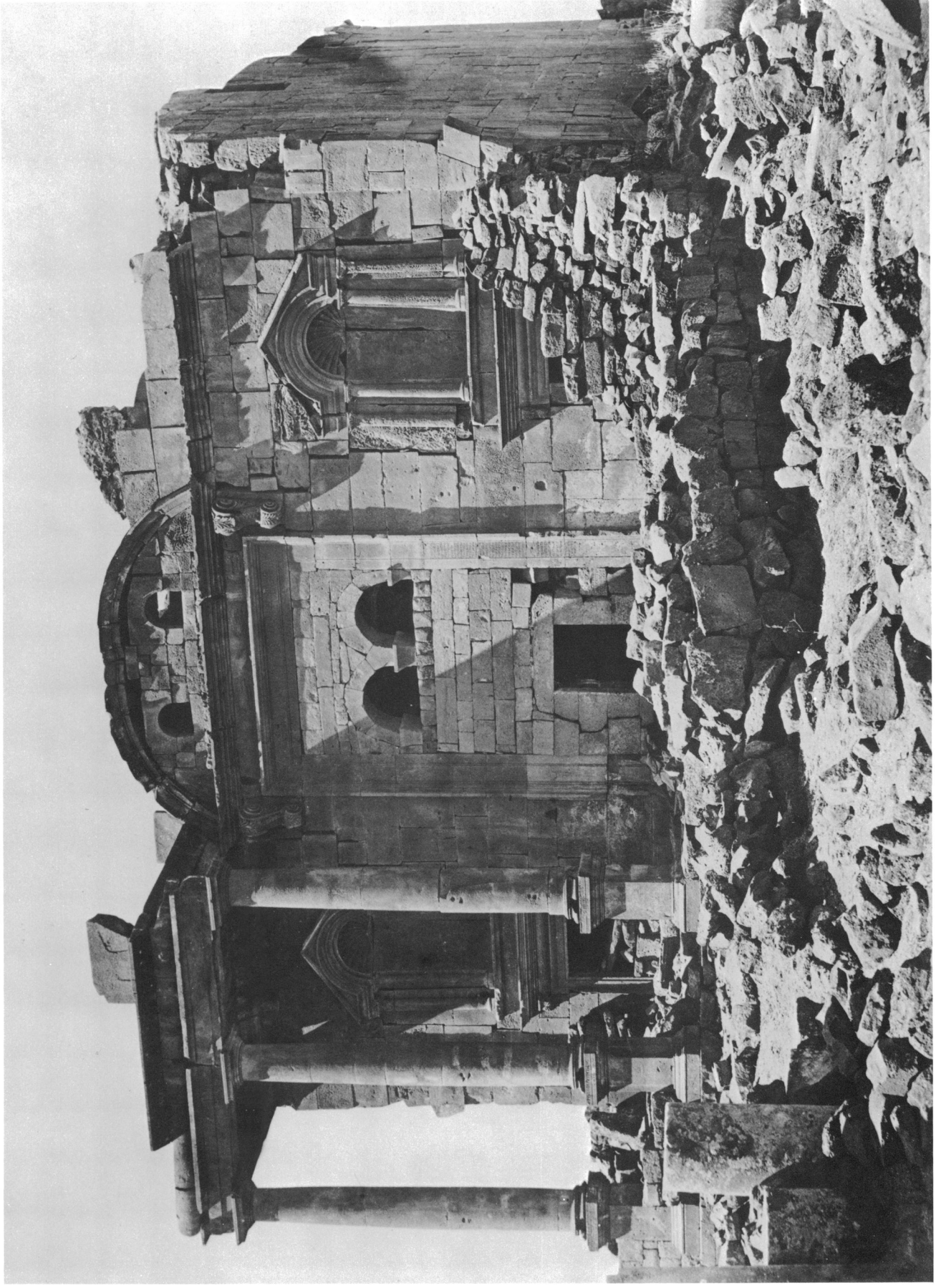
churches. However, whether the centralized plan is purely Roman, or an Early Christian adaptation, the building deserves attention as one chapter in the complicated history of the development of centralized architecture in the Late Roman period.

Weigand believed that this building was not a praetorium, but rather a temple devoted to the cult of Zeus Phainesios or emperor worship.<sup>13</sup> The inscriptions on the building do not conclusively prove or disprove this: Zeus is never mentioned, and the reference to the emperors could have been simply honorific. Indeed, the "Praetorium" is a striking forerunner of the Audience Chamber of Al-Mundir at R'safa, which may be dated as late as the sixth century and the plan of which is so similar.<sup>14</sup> However, the building closest to the "Praetorium" in style and date is the Syrian-type temple, best represented at es-Sanamen and Slem, often cited as the precursor of Early Christian churches in Syria.<sup>15</sup> These do not share the distinctive ground plan, but have the same prominent portico, the same façade with its great central doorway, and the same tripartite "sanctuary" with one doorway from the left side-chamber to the outside and a connection between the right side-chamber and the apse (this must explain the hole which is just visible at the bottom of figure 2, and which appears as a high window in Laborde's view). This whole group of monuments, whether sacred or profane, must be considered relevant to the early development of Christian architecture in Syria. In this respect the building at Musmiye, which is one of the earliest and most complex of the examples, is of particular interest.

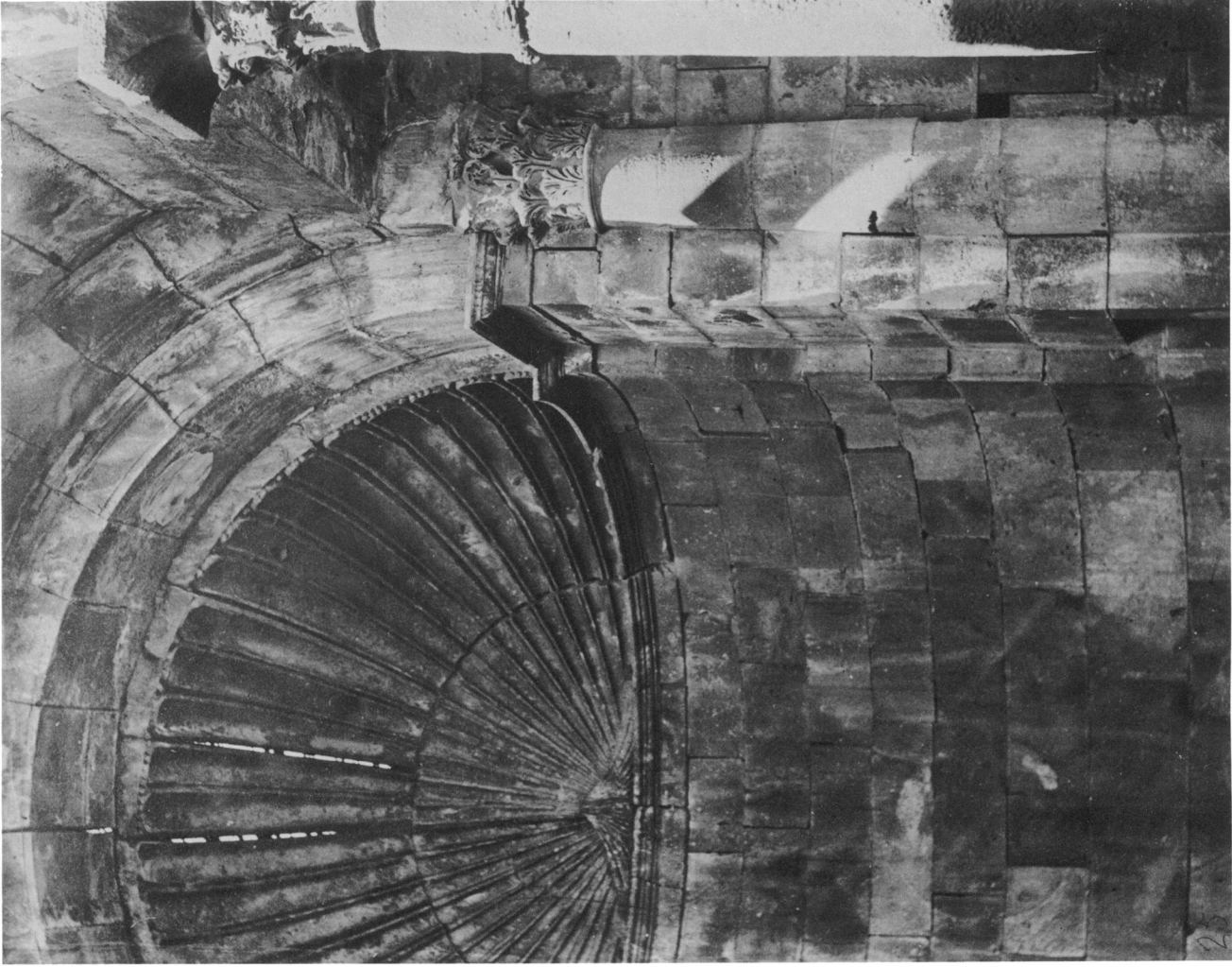
<sup>13</sup> Weigand, *op. cit.*, 83–85.

<sup>14</sup> J. Sauvaget, "Les Ghassanides et Sergiopolis," *Byzantion*, 14 (1939), 115–30.

<sup>15</sup> *Syria*, Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904–5 and 1909. Division II: H. C. Butler, *Architecture*, Section B, *North Syria* (Leyden, 1920), 315–20 (es-Sanamen), and 356–59 (Slem); *idem*, "The Tychaion at es-Sanamen and the Plan of the Early Christian Churches in Syria," *RA*, 4th Ser., 8 (1906), 413–23.

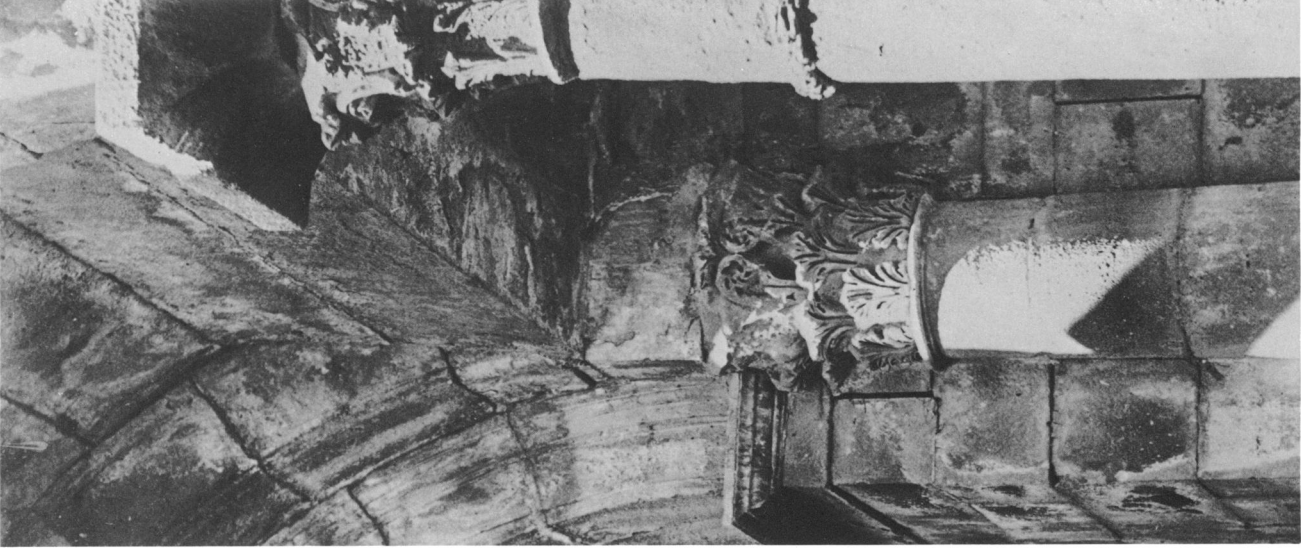


1. Syria, Musmiye, the "Praetorium," Exterior View



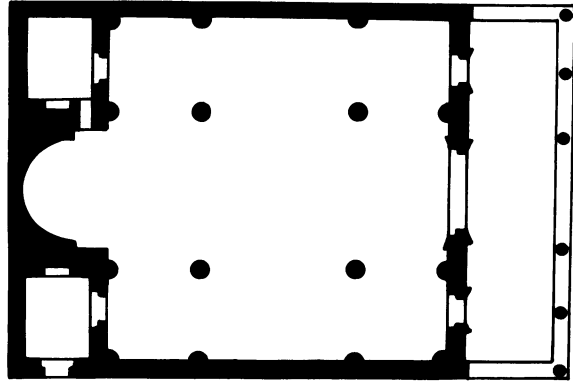
2.

Interior View



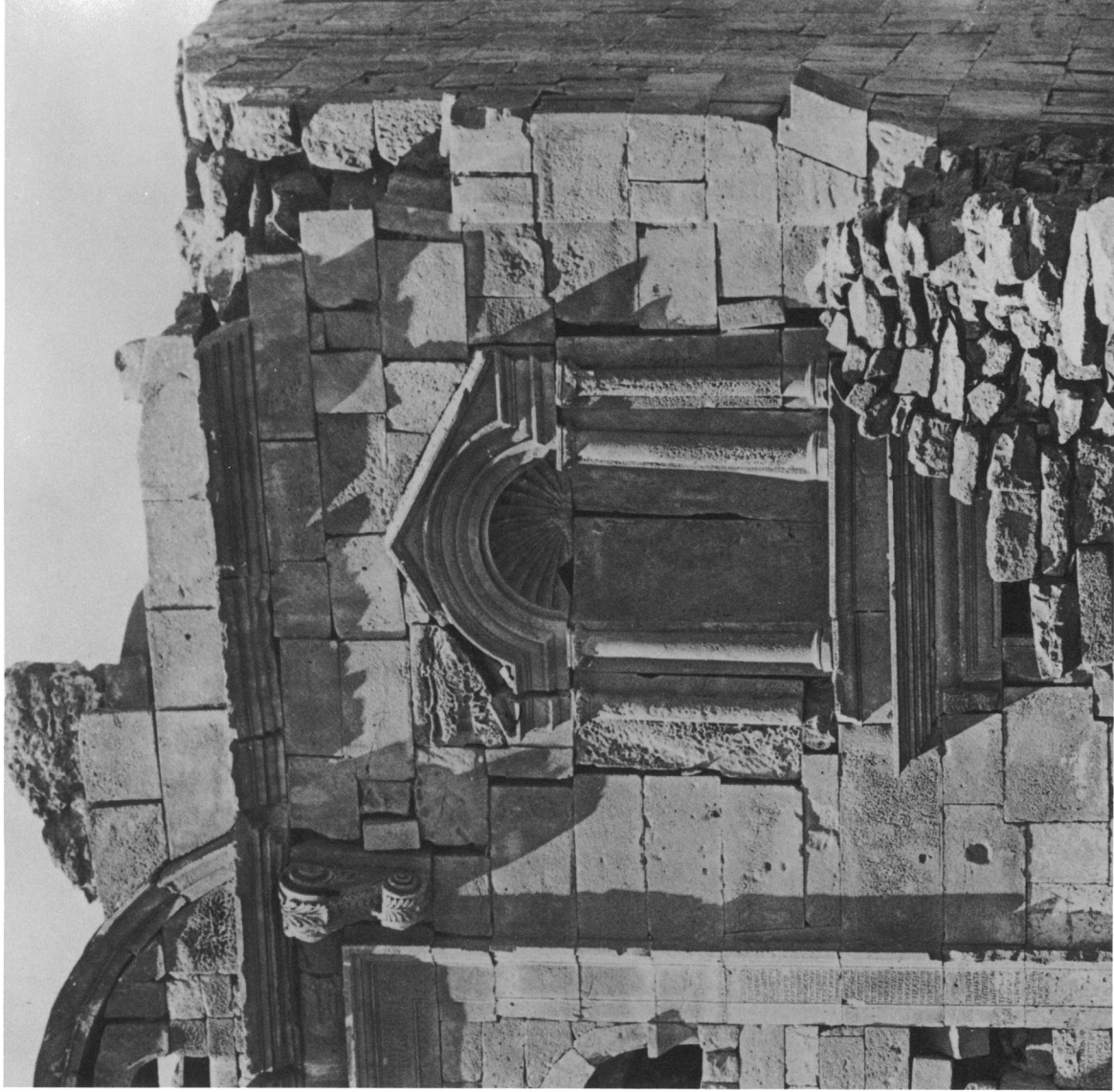
3. Detail



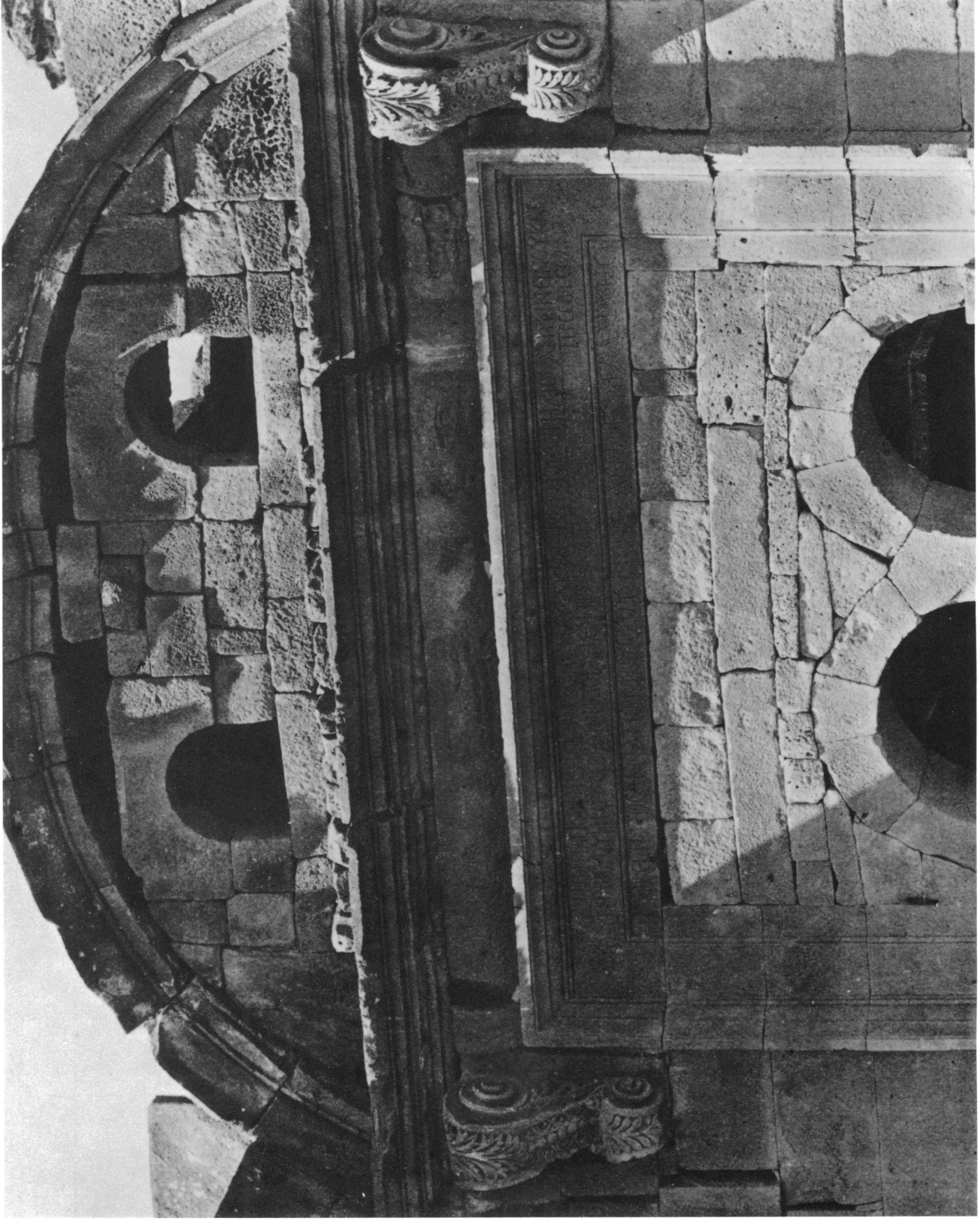


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4. Ground Plan



5. Figure 1, detail, Right-hand Aedicula



6. Figure 1, detail, Main Doorway, with Inscription on Lintel